



High on the Desert Cochise County Master Gardener Newsletter

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The University of Arizona and U.S. Department of Agriculture Cooperating

Gardening in water Get your hands wet with Angel

Growing Plants in Water

I have been asked several times to explain how I put together the center-pieces I made for the High on the Desert Garden Conference. They are basically easy. The difficulty is plant availability. I used two different designs; one contained tropical houseplants and the other pond plants.

I will begin with the houseplants. To start you need a big clear glass vase. The so-called "Beta" vases work best and they are for sale at discount stores in the craft section. Of course any clear vase will do. You can root most vine-like tropical houseplants and use them for this project or you can use a tropical houseplant

growing in a 4" or 6" pot. Shake off the soil and wash the roots well. I like to soak the roots for 24 hours in half the recommended strength of a B1 solution. This helps the plant over transplanting shock. Make sure that all the soil is gone because it will cloud the water in the vase. Put some ornamental glass stones or aquarium gravel on the bottom of the vase. The color is of your choice. Place your plant into the vase and fill it up with filtered water and add a few drops of half strength liquid houseplant food. Filtered water will help with the calcium build up. Sometimes these Beta vases come with a plastic insert which is very handy. Cut a hole in the size to accommodate your plant. This will stabilize the plant, espe-

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cially if you add big glass stones. I added one submerged pond plant to my design to oxygenate the water and help with algae build up and for some additional interest, but again it depends on availability. If you make your arrangement from grown cuttings, use a variety of different shaped or colored leaves for additional interest.

Good plants to use:

Spathiphyllum – Peace Lily; the most suited plant, glossy leaves and anthurium-shaped white flower heads

Anthurium – Flamingo Flower; striking red flower spikes

Chamaedorea – Parlor Palm

Chlorophytum – Spider Plant

Heptapleurum – Schefflera

Zantedeschia – Calla Lily

Plants to take cuttings from that are easy to root (root in half strength liquid houseplant fertilizer):

Scindapsus – Trailing Pothos; has also variegated forms

Tradescantia – Wandering Jew; comes in many varieties, variegation, red leaves

Streptocarpus – Dauphin Violet; in the African violet family, lovely true blue flowers.

Gibasis geniculata – Tahitian Bridal Veil; small leaves, and pretty small white flowers

These arrangements need bright light but no direct sun or you will cook your plant. Water needs to be exchanged from time to time but mostly kept topped up.

Keep in mind, even as these containers are advertised as beta fish containers, it is not recommended to keep these fish in them. Betas are gorgeous creatures and deserve to be treated better. They are fish of the genus *Anabantoides* and can breathe air and need space to come up to do that. They do not mind crowded containers and a lot of plant material, but they are tropical fish and like warm water temperature and air temperatures of 80 to 85 degrees. Houseplants like cooler temperatures and the temperature in the average house is a lot cooler which would stress the fish. Betas need to be kept in an aquarium with a heater and they need good water quality. That means good filtration, 20% water exchange frequently with the same water temperature, and no chemical fertilizer or they will get sick and die.

Angel Rutherford, Master Gardener



Cuttings 'N' Clippings

* The next regular meeting of Cochise County Master Gardeners Association is May 8, 2002 at the Sierra Vista Library, 5:00—7:00 pm. Extension Agent, Darcy Tessman, will update us on the Junior Master Gardener Program and how it is working in our local schools.

* **April is Sierra Vista Sub Watershed—Water Awareness Month!** The April 6 *Water Wise* workshop is **Hands-On Irrigation** with Jim Shaffer, Irrigation Systems Specialist and Plant Sciences Center Horticultural Technician. The free workshop takes place at the University of Arizona South, 1140 N Colombo, Sierra Vista at 9:00 a.m..

* On Wednesday, April 10 from 6:30—8:30 p.m. Cochise College, Benson Campus, is offering a **Water Wise Landscaping** class—learn how to design a water wise landscape: design, plant selection, irrigation considerations, site assessment and more. Call 515-5492 to register. It will be offered again on Saturday, April 13 from 9:00—11:00 a.m. at the Sierra Vista Campus. Call 515-5492 to register.

* A **Septic Care Workshop** will be held at the Mona Bishop Room of the Sierra Vista Public Library on Saturday, April 27 from 1:30—4:00 p.m. The free workshop is co-sponsored by the City of Sierra Vista's Environmental Affairs and *Water Wise*.

* Saturday, April 27 from 7:30 a.m.—dark the **2nd Annual San Pedro River Festival** will be held. Call 459-2555 for info.

* Saturday, May 4 from 9:00—10:00 a.m. a free *Water Wise* Workshop will be held at the University of Arizona South called **When Do I Water?**

* Also on May 4 from 9:00—1:00 p.m. a self-guided low water landscape **Xeriscape Tour** will be held sponsored by the Cochise County Master Gardeners and *Water Wise*. Call the Cooperative Extension Office for a map. This is also a free activity and open to the public.

* Diamond JK Nursery: April 9-13 Spring Sale—10% off everything.

Robert E. Call

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Extension Agent, Horticulture

Carolyn Gruenhagen
Editor

• NOTICE •

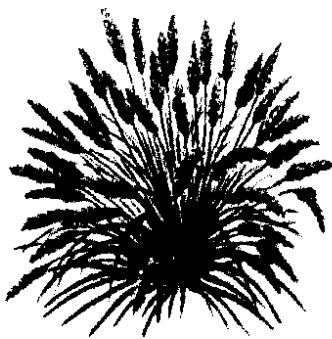
Attached to this newsletter you will find a Master Gardener Mailing List Update Form. If you wish to continue receiving the newsletter you must return the signed form by mail or by dropping it off at the Willcox or Sierra Vista Cooperative Extension Offices by the end of May 2002. You may also sign up electronically on our Web Site: www.ag.arizona.edu/cochise/mg/

The Virtual Gardener—Fountain Grass

The editorial page of the *Arizona Daily Star* for March 23 included a Guest Opinion article by Pat Graham, Robert Edison, and Luther Propst on the dangers of invasive plants in Arizona. Graham is the state director for the Nature Conservancy in Arizona; Edison is the interim executive director of the Arizona Sonora Desert Museum; and Propst is the executive director of the Sonoran Institute.

After discussing the threats posed to native plants by invasive exotics and pointing out their economic impact to agriculture, the article discussed two invasive exotics that pose particular threats to the Sonoran Desert—buffelgrass and fountain grass—and recommended that readers destroy these plants if they find them growing in their yards. The article referred readers to the Nature Conservancy's Web site at www.nature.org/arizona for pictures of five invasive exotics that threaten the Sonoran Desert—buffelgrass, fountain grass, tamarisk, Sahara mustard, and Malta star thistle—and additional information about them. Fountain grass (*Pennisetum setaceum*) is of particular interest to me because it is widely used as an ornamental, so I did a little investigating on the Web.

Fountain grass is native to rocky slopes in Kenya, Tanzania, and western and northeast Africa, growing at altitudes from sea level to 6000 feet. Its tall, graceful form and long, white seed heads contrasting with slender green leaves makes it an attractive ornamental, and it grows well in Arizona, perhaps too well. The problem is it produces a prodigious number of seeds which disperse on the wind and readily sprout in the wild, forming dense colonies that suffocate native grasses and pose a major fire threat.



Pennisetum setaceum
'Rubrum'

Although the Nature Conservancy recommends you destroy the plants if you have them in your yard and the Arizona Native Plant Society suggests you at least remove the

seed heads, there is a way you can have your cake and eat it too. If you really enjoy the look of the plant in your garden, replace the green variety with the red variety (*Pennisetum setaceum* var. *Rubrum*) which does not set seed, is not invasive, and has an even more dramatic presence than the green variety.

You can find more information about fountain grass at the following Web sites:

<http://plants.usda.gov/plants>

<http://pss.uvm.edu/pss123/grspenn.html>

<http://www.nps.gov/plants/alien/fact/pese1.htm>

Until next time. Happy surfing.

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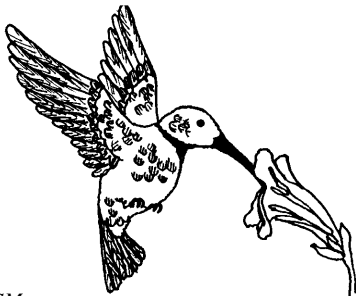
April Reminders

- ⇒ Stake new trees
- ⇒ Plant cool-season veggies
- ⇒ Fertilize
- ⇒ Prepare for pests

Introduction to Creating a Wildlife Habitat Garden

There are four basic components to habit gardening: water, food, shelter, and places to raise young. I will focus on these basics in the upcoming months, as well as garden design basics and my favorite resources to provide information on how to attract birds, hummingbirds, butterflies and other desert creatures to your garden.

The best approach to a habitat garden is DIVERSITY. Select a variety of plants that will provide fruits, berries, seeds & nuts, nectar & pollen, attract insects, and offer shelter and nesting opportunities throughout the year. Diverse habitat types include a meadow here, woodland area over there, an area where tall grasses, weeds, and wildflowers are allowed to go to seed, a row of shrubs near the fence line, a brush pile out back, *etc.* These different types of *ecotones* create “edges” and will attract a wide assortment of birds, butterflies and other creatures.



GM

Here is the homework:

ASSESS THE GARDEN: What worked well in the garden last year and more importantly, what didn't work. If plants are not thriving — why? Is it due to a lack of water—then perhaps it needs to be relocated to a spot where it would receive an adequate amount. Perhaps the garden has matured and plants that were once in sunny spots are now shaded by large

shrubs and trees resulting in leggy plants and sparse blooms. Evaluate and make a list of chores that need to be addressed. If starting a new garden don't even think about getting any plants until a temporary or permanent irrigation system is installed.

DRAW A MAP: Draw a map of the garden to include all hardscape, the house (mark the window locations for wildlife viewing from inside the house), and any future plans such as greenhouses, RV pads, *etc.* that you may want to install at a later date. Don't forget to mark heavy traffic areas. The map doesn't need to be to scale but you can certainly use graph paper to make a detailed map to scale. This will help you see your landscape from a “birds-eye-view.” The map will come in handy when we discuss creating habitat niches.

TAKING INVENTORY:

- A) Make a list the wildlife you would like to attract to the garden.
- B) Make a list of all the plants currently in the garden.
- C) Now divide the plants into the following categories:
 1. Plants that produce berries, fruits or nuts
 2. Plants that provide nectar for butterflies and hummingbirds
 3. Plants that produce seeds for birds and other animals
 4. Plants that attract insects and bugs both good & bad
 5. Plants that provide shelter and shade for animals
 6. List any features and plants that you DON'T like in your garden

Number 6 may seem strange but I have talked to too many gardeners who live with things they don't like! My belief is that one should LOVE

everything about their garden. Focus on gradually replacing plants and features with things you would LOVE to see in your garden.

If the spirit moves you start NOW by removing plants or garden features you don't like.

Next month: Using your homework lists we will discuss Design Basics.

Cheri Melton, Master Gardener

Cheri's Habitat Garden “What To-Do” List

April in the High Desert is usually windy, hot, dry, and did I mention **WINDY!**

- The months of April, May, and June are just not conducive to planting—my strategy is to shop the spring sales but hold the plants in a spot next to the house that receives morning sun and afternoon shade. When the summer rains begin in July I then plant them out in the garden.
- Work on irrigation systems—revamp or install new systems
- This month the garden will be blessed with the appearance of insects!!! Nesting birds will switch from seed eating to consuming insects for protein needs.
- If you don't have birds visiting garden start attracting them now by purchasing or building a feeder and filling it with high quality birdseed.

I Love Sages

I fell in love with sages on my first xeriscape tour so I decided that I wanted to learn more about my favorites. I find it interesting that they are part of the mint family and **all** sages are salvias. Some people think of sage only as a culinary herb, but it is also used for medicinal purposes and as ornamentals.

I think *Salvia clevelandii* knocked me off my feet first. It is a California native and fares well in our winters. If I was within 20 feet of one, I could smell it and would start looking for it even if it wasn't blooming. I now have two and what a joy! They are fast growing, almost hate water, and what a fragrance! They make a wonderful cut or dry bouquet. Most sages are edible, seeds can be roasted or ground and mixed with water for porridge. They take low water, full sun, bloom spring through fall, and grow 3-5 feet tall and 3-5 feet wide. I trim old flower buds on all salvias to keep them blooming

The next sage on my list of favorites is *Perovskia atriplicifolia* (Russian Sage). It is a deciduous perennial, drought tolerant, heat tolerant, pest resistant shrub. Don't cut it back too much in the winter even though it looks dead and give it a chance to green up in the spring. It has delicate, lacy, silvery leaves that are a fragrant addition to any garden. I found it a challenge to find a companion plant. It takes the show whatever it is next to. It is fast growing to 4 feet. I started with one and it seeded easily so now I have

four. We are more familiar with the blue variety but it does come in pink also. Propagate it by tip cuttings in the summer or seeds in the spring



I accidentally planted a Mexican sage (*Salvia leucantha*) several years ago and at the time didn't even know it. I say accidentally only because I saw it, bought it, and didn't realize the impact that sages would eventually have on my garden and me. Much to my delight, it blooms late in the summer giving a fresh food supply to all the hummers that come to my garden. I stuck a broken woody stem in a pot of succulents, and now have my second plant. They are really easy to propagate in the spring/summer. They have white tubular flowers surrounded by showy chenille-like calyxes. This plant grows 4 feet high by 4 feet wide, uses very little water, and even tolerates filtered shade. It attracts bees, butterflies, insects,

and hummingbirds. It also provides protection for birds. I was told it is deer resistant.

Salvia chamaedryoides—I fell head over heels for this silvery “mouth watering” gray with knock-your-eyes-out blue flowering plant. They have small leaves and woody stems. I am glad I don't have to pick one favorite, however if I did, this may be it. I have three and am not sure that will be enough. The two in my front yard are in the hottest area with rocks surrounding them, little water, and they are beautiful and happy. The one in the back is more mature, in shade part of the day and gets a little more water due to its proximity to my vegetable garden. It is beautiful and happy too. It uses little water and grows 2-3 feet high and 2-3 feet wide.

I have to mention the showstopper in my yard during the Fall Xeriscape Tour. It was my *S. greggii* x *microphylla* v *grahamii* Maraschino Cherry; is one of many *S. greggii*s and their crosses. They can be evergreen if winters are mild; height varies from low mounding to up to 3 feet. They flower early, and where temperatures stay below 90°, they flower until frost. They need to be pruned to keep them from getting leggy. They can be used dried, as a seasoning, and the flowers are great for salads and garnishes. The bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds find

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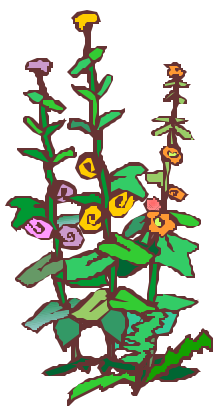
them irresistible.

Yes, I love my autumn sages (*Salvia greggii*). Why not? They are the staple for my bees and hummers, they bloom all summer, and can handle almost any kind of soil and low water. I have chiffon, coral, red, pink and a recently added a white-colored variety. I am on a mad search for a fuchsia-colored salvia after I saw my first one on the last xeriscape tour. I plan on planting many more. I just hope I don't run out of room!

Maybe I didn't mention your favorite. I would have to write a book to cover them all. I have been told there are over 900 different

varieties of salvias. I enjoy these two books on sages: *A Book of Salvias: Sages for every garden* by Betsy Cleisch and *The Gardener's Guide to Growing Salvias* by John Sutton, Paul Picton

Emily Boyd, Master Gardener



Bisbee Farmer's Market

Beginning May 4, 2002 an old-fashioned Farmer's Market will be held in the Warren District's Vista Park, Bisbee, on Saturday mornings from 7:30—11:30 a.m. Items available include farm products, plants, home crafts, nature crafts, food products, yard and garden art. In addition, knife sharpening, portable massage, hair braiding and small repair services will be offered. For more information or if you would like to be a vendor call 432-0377 or 432-7066 or e-mail:

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